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## THE ABORIGINES OF THE CANARY ISLANDS

By ALICE CARTER COOK

### EARLY HISTORY AND TRADITION

The first chapter in the history of Spanish colonial policy did not begin with the much-suffering Americas, where Cortés, Balboa, Pizarro, and Weyler have held their revels of blood. The earliest victims of these most Christian conquests were the remarkable aboriginal race of the Canary islands, which was so completely destroyed or assimilated by the Spaniards that not all the ingenuity of modern anthropological study has been able to solve the riddle of its origin nor to decide its ethnic relationships. Legend tells how a terrific cataclysm reduced a magnificent continent to the few isolated islands of today. Plato has described the sensations of a man on being first brought into the sunlight, having always lived in darkness; but the poet is yet to sing whose theme shall be the peasant of the inland mountain-tops suddenly become a dweller by the sea,—his craggy home sunk to the level of the ocean,—the thunder of the waves taking the place of forest silences. But scarcely less startling was the transformation wrought in the Canary islanders by the Spanish conquest. In the guise of Christianity they received slavery; for civilization, extermination; while their simple, strong, and wholesome life was superseded by the empty pomp and groveling superstition of the invaders.

Writers have carried the story of the archipelago back to times preceding Plato. In its isles have been located the gardens of the Hesperides, the Elysian fields, the remnants of the continent of Atlantis, the "Fortunate isles" of the old Romans, and even the Paradise of the early Christians. They were supposed to be at

the end of the world,—“there where the ocean refuses to carry vessels, where the sun buries itself in the waves, in the empire of night,”—and to constitute a sort of intellectual gymnasium where the minds of poets and philosophers performed remarkable feats of imagination.

Pliny says that the “Fortunate islands produce all the goods of the earth as all the fruits, without sowing nor planting,” and that “the pagans of the Indies believe that their souls after death fly away to these islands and there live eternally on the perfume of the fruits, and they think that there is Paradise.” But, he concludes, “to speak the truth, this is fable.”

Lucian writes: “Always in the fields of the Fortunate islands is the seat of Spring. The vines yield fruit twelve times in the year and every one of the months pays the tribute of its grapes. . . . In the place of wheat the ears shed bread prepared in their tops and crown, like mushrooms. The fountains are 375 of water, as many others of honey, and 500 of oil, balsam, and divers odorous liquors. And these fountains are the lesser, for of milk there are seven rivers and eight of wine.” In 1344 Jacques Ferrer made a curious map of the archipelago and declared that these were called Fortunate islands because they “abound in all — as grains, fruits, herbs, and trees.” From them the Phenicians are supposed to have brought the famous Tyrian purple dye which Solomon sought for the adornment of his temple.

Ideas of the people were as vague and exaggerated as of the country. Sallust tells us that Quintus Sertorius wished to go to the Fortunate islands “where were men no higher than some cubits and whose bones were flexible like nerves, and who were so strong that what they once held in their fingers could not be taken from them by the greatest force; . . . They had no hairs except on the head — no eyebrows, eyelashes, nor beards,” and the tongue was “split at the root so that in the same time they could ask with one half and answer with the other.” (What a boon this would be to modern children!) “They lived 400 years, and the

earth of its own good grace produced everything. When tired of life they dipped their faces in an herb, and after a short sleep, passed to the other life. The recently-born children were tied to birds, and those who survived the flight without nausea were allowed to live, the others being considered unfit to raise. They knew not what is discord, neither were they unhealthy or sick."

Francis Barret in *Natural Magic* says that "Guanche mummies are monsters, the result of marriages between devils and men. . . . They were dried, dead carcases, almost three-footed, and so small that a boy might easily carry one of them on the palm of his hand, and they were of an exact human shape, but clear and transparent, and their bones flexible like gristles. . . . I considered that to this day the destroyed race of the Pygmies was there!" These dried corpses were brought by shiploads to Europe in the seventeenth century to be used in magic and medicine. A piece of Guanche mummy and the so-called "dragon's blood," also a Canary product,<sup>1</sup> were ingredients in the most powerful charms and quite indispensable in compounding the "philosopher's stone."

In contrast to the pygmy view, we read in other old books that the Fortunate islands were inhabited by a race of giants, one of whom is described as 14 feet high and having 80 teeth. M. Julien Danielo considers that the *Odyssey* is a compendium of Phenician travel, and that Polyphemus was a gigantic Guanche. Another writer says that every Guanche at one meal "took one little goat and twenty rabbits."

So fancy ran riot over this prolific field and the Spaniards did their utmost to augment the confusion of truth and fiction. They made no effort to preserve to history a knowledge of the customs, traditions, or characteristics of the race which they subdued for the glory of the church. The conquest was completed about the time of the discovery of the New World, and, very shortly after, the native families not exterminated had been absorbed by

<sup>1</sup> A resinous exudation from the so-called dragon tree, *Dracæna draco*.

intermarriage with the victors and quickly lost all trace of their former habits of life.

Some rare old Spanish and French books which evaded inquisitorial vigilance in the fine library at Laguna de Teneriffe, contain much valuable information regarding the islanders which has hitherto remained almost unknown to English-speaking people.

The inhabited islands of the archipelago at the time of their discovery, as now, were seven in number; by name, beginning with the most easterly, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Grand Canary, Teneriffe, Palma, Gomera, and Hierro.<sup>1</sup> The natives had no communication with one another, for the use of boats was unknown. The only recorded exception is the story derived from the island legends that the knowledge of making fire by friction was brought to Hierro by a woman who swam from Gomera, 33 miles distant, on two leather bags filled with air. This is most significant and hardly reconcilable with theories of the original migration by sea from northern Africa; for what maritime people ever lost the knowledge of boats? Admitting the possibility for the settlers of one island, is it not curious that such a useful art should have been forgotten seven distinct times? This ignorance is to us perhaps the strongest argument in favor of the hypothesis that the present archipelago is all that remains of a more extensive continent. Moreover, the inhabitants of Teneriffe could not swim—a strange lack in an island people,—while those of Palma ate no fish and did not know how to catch them, and the methods of fishing on the other islands seem to have been independently developed. Bows and arrows were also unknown in any of the islands until the time of the Spanish conquest. All of these facts become less mysterious in the light of the submergence theory. The dwellers on the inland mountains of a vast country, if

<sup>1</sup> The Canaries were the only Atlantic islands which were inhabited at the time of their discovery, Madeira, the Azores, and the Cape Verde group having no aborigines. There are six rocky islets in the Canary archipelago, without water and unpeopled.

suddenly dropped, as it were, into mid-ocean, would be and might remain without means or desire to cross the unknown barrier of water. Have not the savage tribes in other lands inhabited a single valley for untold centuries, oblivious of the world beyond their mountain-locked home?

The residual origin of the Guanches, as the indigenes of the Canaries are commonly called, is not, however, generally accepted. Nuñez de la Pena truthfully says: "There are many opinions concerning the origin of the Canaries and each upholds his own as best he can, and, of all, which is the most certain God alone knows." An old man replied to the conquerors who asked whence came his people, "Our ancestors have told us that God put us in this island and that He has forgotten us, but that from the east would come the light which should enlighten us." This the Spaniards, of course, applied to themselves and the wonderful gifts of civilization and extermination which they brought. Some of the medieval clerical writers would have us believe that we have here the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel or of the scattered builders of Babel. Others trace the genealogy of the islanders to Noah himself, whose sons and grandsons are made responsible for their colonization and even for their names.

#### RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS

It has been expected that cranial studies would serve as a key to the affinities of the Guanches, though here again there is evidence of long isolation, for Dr Chil claims to be able to recognize the inhabitants of each of the islands by the skull alone. In all cases this is of the dolicocephalic (Cromagnon) type. Crania of the same class are still found among the Basques, in the Landes of southern France, and especially in Africa. According to Henry Gilman, these islanders, in common with the moundbuilders and Peruvians of America and the neolithic people of France, had the custom of boring a hole in the top of the skulls of the dead that

the soul might readily pass in and out. We do not recollect having seen any such perforations in the skulls in Las Palmas Museum, where the best collection exists.

The skeletons of the primitive Canarians<sup>1</sup> are of a very old type, with the much-flattened tibia, such as occurs also among the men of Cromagnon and the ancient inhabitants of Wales, and the perforation of the bone of the arm which is not found in that of modern man. Professor Retzius concludes that there was close relationship between the Guanches and the Moors, Tuaricks, Copts, and the people of the West African coast and the Carib islanders of the opposite shores of the Atlantic; while Webb and Berthelot think that the islands, at about the time of the troglodytes, were occupied by a prehistoric race whose traces remain in the sepulchral caves. "Upon this race were grafted several others,—first Berbers of Libyan origin whose various tribes gave names to the various islands and who remained in the ascendancy in the five western islands. The Arab element afterwards gained the supremacy in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura." There was evidence of the existence of at least two distinct races in the great resemblance to each other of the people of the two most easterly islands and their difference from the remaining islanders in physique, customs, and language. Even in the one island of Teneriffe the swarthy men of the south seem to have little relationship with the blonds of the north. Dr Chil, on the contrary, is emphatic in his opinion that the Guanches were all of one race, "the real Dolman people such as they existed in primitive times," and "the most ancient race known," which, notwithstanding invasions by Libyans, Phenicians, and Romans, "preserved until the conquest some of its purity" and even today is represented by fine types with all of its distinctive characteristics. As to the degree of culture reached in historical times, students agree that it was that of neolithic southwestern Europe and northern Africa.

<sup>1</sup> "Canarians" is used for the inhabitants of all the islands, "Canarios" for those of Grand Canary, the latter being the customary Spanish designation.

## LANGUAGE

Writing was probably unknown to the Guanches. Hieroglyphic cuttings, as yet undeciphered, have been found in Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Palma, Canary, and Hierro, but it seems possible that they are the work of Phenicians who may have touched the islands for commercial purposes. The conquerors might easily have preserved the various languages, which would have formed valuable sources of information, but, careless of all not pertaining to personal gain or aggrandizement, they let slip the great opportunity. Some time after the conquest dawned the brilliant idea that a knowledge of the almost vanished tongues might prove valuable, consequently science and literature were enriched by fragmentary vocabularies of words spelled at the pleasure of the compilers. There is a story that one of the Roman governors of a North African province ordered the instigators of a rebellion with their wives and children to be deprived of their tongues and set adrift in an oarless boat. These mutilated families arrived at the island of Gomera, and the curious guttural language of their descendants, who are described as speaking as if they had no tongues, was supposed to have resulted from learning to talk from such dismembered ancestors.

The inhabitants of the archipelago had been so long isolated that the indigenes of one island could hardly be understood at all on some of the others, though Galindo and Viera state that the speech of Gomera and Hierro was identical, as was also that of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, while captive Canarios were taken as interpreters to Teneriffe. From the lists collected from all available sources by Dr Chil, we have selected several words for objects necessarily familiar on all the islands. The names for kid, vulture, and *gofio* are practically identical. It is noteworthy that the name for "moon" in Palma, Teneriffe, and Lanzarote is so closely similar to the word for "month" in Hierro and Gomera (the year was reckoned by moons on several of the islands), while the Palma and Lanzarote name for month is merely a modification

of the same root. The table shows some other interesting resemblances and also indicates that a native of Hierro would not feel completely at home in Grand Canary. Yet community of origin is evident. The root of the word for "sheep leather" is evident in the Gomeran word for "leather skirt," and there is a common root in the word for "sun" on five of the islands. The word for "kid" (*chivato*) throughout the archipelago is apparently related to the Palma word for "sheep" or "goat" (*te quevite*,—*ch* being probably interchangeable with *que* as the representative of the *k* sound). The similarity between the word for "man" on Lanzarote and that for "son of," so common in compounds, on five of the islands is significant.

#### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS—FEATS OF SKILL

The Guanches as the Europeans found them were of fine physical development. They had the keen eyesight and hearing of primitive peoples, but the senses of touch and taste were blunt. The peasants of today seem to have inherited these latter qualities, for they walk with ease over the stoniest of mountain paths, traverse fields of hot scoriae which burn the feet of booted Europeans, and eat with complacency viands much too highly seasoned even for the Spanish palate.

Esdrisi, in 1154, described the inhabitants of Canary as "white, tall, with long straight hair, the women of rare beauty." The chaplains who chronicled the adventures of Bethencourt, who led the first successful invasions, say, "Go over all the world and you will find in no part more beautiful people, neither better formed than those of these islands, men and women, and they are of great intelligence if they had one to instruct them." Father Galindo, on the other hand, voices what was evidently the Spanish idea: "As all the creation in the heavens as on the earth is subject to the will of God, when I would treat of the nature and of the inclinations of the Guanche race, I would regard them as of the inferior order, made to serve, because the divine will has declared

*COMPARATIVE VOCABULARY OF CANARY DIALECTS*

LANZAROTE	FUERTEVENTURA	GRAN CANARIA	TENERIFFE	PALMA	GOMERA	HIERRO
<i>Water</i> .....		aho	ahof	adago		ahemon
<i>Milk</i> .....		aromatán	tamo			achemen
<i>Barley</i> .....	<i>tamocen</i>	gofio	goifo			tezeree
<i>Toasted flour</i> .....	gofio		hara			goifo
<i>Sheep</i> .....	{ ciguena		tahatan			juraque
<i>Goat</i> .....			aridaman			
<i>Kid</i> .....	chivato		ara, axa			chivato
<i>Sheet leather</i> .....	chivato		chivato			leather skirt
<i>Vulture</i> .....	horhuy				= <i>tahuyan</i>	
<i>Stick</i> .....	harhuy				guirhe	guirhe
<i>Clay pot</i> .....	guirhe					ganigo
<i>Man</i> .....	tezeres		magado			guan
<i>Sun</i> .....	guanigo		son of = guan			zeloy
<i>Moon</i> .....	guamf		{ majec <i>lia</i>			cel
<i>Month</i> .....	alio		magec			cela
<i>God</i> .....						abora
						achoran

itself in this sense upon their souls and made them for servitude, in the same way that certain stars exercise their influence upon others." The chaplains of Bethencourt found in Fuerteventura "men of extraordinary stature and very much attached to and pertinacious in their laws and beliefs. . . . They can scarcely be taken alive, for they run like rabbits, and if one of them is captured and afterwards returns to his people, they put him to death." They were by some supposed to be a race of giants, and were, at least, a tall and strong people. Among the dead after a certain battle the Spaniards found a warrior nine feet in height, and the size of the tombs indicated bodies of large dimensions. Guardafia, king of the country, was a hero of heroes. Tied and held by three Spaniards, he broke his bonds, overthrew the men, and escaped. Thrice captured, he each time burst his chains and freed himself.

Many feats of strength and skill are recorded of the ancient race. Fray Espinosa, who wrote twenty-four years after the conquest, was shown an enormous stone which no European could lift, but which the Guanches were accustomed to raise above their heads. The Spanish told the following tale illustrative of their skill: Three soldiers, each with a basket of oranges, stood before an islander, who, with one hand, caught all the oranges thrown to him, while with the other he returned to each soldier oranges from his own basket. One Canario was so strong, and at the same time so agile, that no one with the force of both hands could prevent his lifting a glass of water to his lips and drinking it without spilling a drop. Another was taken to Seville, where, for a *cuarto* (less than half a cent), he would stand and dodge stones thrown at him from a distance of eight paces. It was a favorite sport in Canary and Teneriffe to "climb a cliff, which only to behold makes the spectator dizzy, and plant a great pole firmly at its summit as a memento." The Spaniards said that the devil assisted the natives in doing this in order that others who should emulate them might fall from the precipice.

and perish. A common feat in Lanzarote was the jumping successively of three poles, each held by two men as high above their heads as possible. The Gomerans were trained to fight from their earliest years. Little boys were taught to dodge clay balls without moving their feet outside of a small circle in which they stood. Later stones were substituted for the balls; then blunt, and finally pointed, javelins. They became so expert that they caught in their hands stones, darts, and arrows; wooden darts thrown by them passed completely through the bodies of their adversaries; stones flew as swiftly from their hands as from a harquebus, and with a few strokes they dashed a Spanish buckler into pieces.

Wrestling was extensively practised in Lanzarote. Each of the combatants tied a cord around his waist, to which his opponent held fast while, touching shoulder to shoulder, they tried to overthrow each other. From infancy they practised carrying weights and so were ultimately able to throw with unerring aim enormous stones which their foes could hardly lift. Mock contests, which often became bloody, were a chief feature of the feasts of Fuerteventura, Teneriffe, and Canary. It is said that some of the champions were able to fight for two hours continuously. In order to strengthen themselves they oiled their bodies and embraced the trunks of trees for several hours each day. In Grand Canary when a challenge had been given and accepted, the parties obtained permission to fight from the council of nobles, and this was confirmed by the *faycan* or spiritual head of the land. Then, as in Teneriffe, the friends assembled in the place of public meetings, where councils were held, feasts celebrated, and justice executed. The contestants stood on flat stones about two feet long, at each end of a raised platform. They first threw stones at one another which were dodged without moving the feet; then, armed with javelin, flint, hatchet, or cudgel, they approached and finally came to close quarters. When the wounds became too severe, or the engagement had been sufficiently pro-

tracted, the chief of the judges called "Enough!" and the combat was suspended while the weary men retired to be refreshed with food and water brought by their friends. Then the fray was resumed until the judges called another halt, and ever after the opponents were good friends. If a cudgel broke, the fight ended and neither was considered victor; if the warriors were wounded, a rush beaten out until it became like a tow was dipped into hot goat-butter and applied to the injured spot. Two of Canary's renowned warriors once engaged in such a duel and fought long without advantage to either. Then one said, "You are valiant, I confess it, but will you follow me?" "I am ready," was the reply. Whereupon the first led the way to the edge of a frightful abyss and threw himself into the sea, followed instantly by his undaunted adversary. Such Spartan feats were not uncommon. A Palman chief, called Mayantiyo ("morsel of heaven") because of his great beauty, was wounded in battle; gangrene resulted, and he amputated his own arm at the elbow with a stone knife.

The Guanches ran like deer and climbed like goats, the women vying with the men in courage and hardihood. In 1443 a Portuguese squadron, returning from Africa, stopped to attack Palma. The shepherds fled and, when pursued, climbed the perpendicular cliffs with an agility that amazed and balked their foes, the women following the men so lightly that babies carried at the breast were not disturbed. Again Portuguese and Spaniards united in a raid on Palma. A Spaniard followed one of the women, who, turning, caught him in her arms and ran to a precipice whence she was about to throw herself and him when another of the enemy overtook her and cut off her legs. The people of Teneriffe did not know how to swim, but some of the islanders were excellent swimmers. The men of Lanzarote were accustomed to swim the nine miles which separated them from Graciosa—a rocky, uninhabited islet where they hunted sea-wolves. The woman who swam from Gomera to Hierro has already been

mentioned. In swimming, as in fighting, the hair was bound with green withes.

#### FOOD—COOKING UTENSILS

This great physical development was the accompaniment, and probably the result, of very simple living. In the words of Viera y Clavijo, the Canarians "show us men happy and robust, who preserved life to the greatest old age with very little art of cookery." The native fruits were mocans (*Visnea mocanera*), bicararos (*Canarina campanula*), a species of *Prunus*—all three peculiar to the islands,—blackberries, creces (*Faya fragifera*), and dates. The nuts of the native pine were highly esteemed, and figs, introduced before the conquest into Canary and Fuerteventura, multiplied rapidly. Galindo says that the fragrance of the numerous flowers of Palma was perceptible at night across the sea for a distance of three leagues, and there bees abounded. There was also much honey produced in Canary, and the palm trees yielded a so-called honey, more properly molasses, said to have valuable medicinal properties.

The staple foods were parched grain, milk, meat, and fish. Azmara wrote that the Gomerans lived "chiefly on milk, herbs, and fern roots, but do not disdain rats, pigs, lice, and ticks." His bill of fare has not, however, been duplicated by other historians. In 1341 four captives taken to Portugal from Grand Canary were described as "sufficiently civilized and less savage than many of the Spanish." When offered food and drink, they refused wine and ate grain from their hands. "They showed themselves of remarkable loyalty, for if one of them received anything good to eat, before tasting it he divided it into portions that each one might have a share." Grain was eaten in the form of *gofio*. This is wheat, corn, or barley, first parched and then ground fine by means of stone hand-mills such as were commonly used in the East in Bible times. It was eaten with milk, water, or honey. It was a food of primitive peoples, and formed a part of the

present sent by Abagail to David. It was the *polenta* of the Latins, and appeared at the feasts of the Homeric heroes. It is still the staff of life to the Canary peasants during a great part of the year, and many eat very little else during the times when fruits are scarce. The laborer goes to his work provided with a little bag of *gofio* and a large piece of home-made cheese. The meal and water were formerly put into the neck of a whole goatskin bag and kneaded violently upon a flat stone until a paste was formed. The modern man does the kneading between his hands. In Palma and Hierro they had no cereals,<sup>1</sup> but made a meal, which took the place of *gofio*, from the roots of the common brake. This was mixed with milk and butter to make a sort of bread. Another farinaceous food was obtained in Palma by boiling the seeds of a kind of *Chenopodium* in milk. This was eaten with a brush made of the macerated roots of *Malva*. André Thevet describes the Canarios as "the greatest eaters of meat that one can find. . . . They devour as much as six Scotchmen who were considered very great sarcophages." Bethencourt's chaplains declared that the inhabitants of Fuerteventura lived chiefly on meat and ate fat as we do bread. So many goats were there at the time of the conquest that 60,000 could be killed every year, each one yielding the "truly marvelous" quantity of thirty or forty pounds of fat. They had no salt, and their houses were filled with the fragrance of flesh hung there to dry. The people of Teneriffe are reported to have eaten little dogs, and those of Hierro the great lizards as large as cats with which the isle abounded.

The Teneriffians were the epicures of the islands and quite fastidious in their table customs. They washed the hands and

<sup>1</sup> This would seem to be a very effective argument for the truth of the supposed lack of communication between the islands, and certainly tends to strengthen the cataclysmal theory of their origin. It is easy to understand how a pastoral people living on the craggy summits of mountains might cultivate no cereals, but it is exceedingly difficult to believe that people knowing nothing of the use of boats could have been carried by accident to a new island or that, if equipped with means of transportation, they should fail to provide a food-supply. The Polynesians, for instance, have spread not one, but several, food-plants throughout the islands of the Pacific.

face after sleeping and before and after eating, and did not drink for half an hour after eating, thinking it bad for the teeth. They always ate meat alone, that the flavor might not be impaired. (This custom seems to have persisted, for today in this paradise of potatoes, tomatoes, and bananas, one is served to course after course of meat, with only an occasional microscopic sprinkling of vegetables.) *Gofio* followed the meat, and was eaten with salt and water, or with milk, or palm or mocan honey. Spoons of shell were sometimes used. Goat flesh dressed with hog lard and butter constituted a feast in Grand Canary. A pit in the ground was thoroughly heated by fire obtained, as on all the islands, by the friction of sticks ; the animal was interred and the hole hermetically sealed. In Teneriffe the hole was covered with earth and a fire built over it. Lambs, in numbers proportioned to the guests, were roasted whole at feasts in Hierro. The company sat around in a circle on the ground and did not rise until all had been eaten. It is said that this Shaker-like custom forbidding wastefulness, perhaps at the expense of gluttony, is still retained. Urtusanstegui, writing at the end of the last century, speaks of great heaps of shells twenty feet long and several feet deep, accompanying the calcined remains of other feasts of the indigenes.

The cooking was done in pots made then, as now, by the peasants of the mountain sides. In many places the soft volcanic rock is riddled with holes, which, on closer inspection, prove to be the homes of nineteenth-century troglodytes, who make pottery, care for their flocks, and eat *gofio* much as their ancestors have done for untold centuries. The men bring clay, and their wives and daughters, seated on the floor of a cave lighted only by the entrance-way, fashion it into jars, bowls, and platters of forms identical with those found near the mummies in the sepulchral caves. Turf ovens now do the work of baking which was formerly accomplished in pits above which fire was built. Bent women who have worked in this way from early youth become so accustomed to the sitting posture that it is with difficulty they walk at all, and

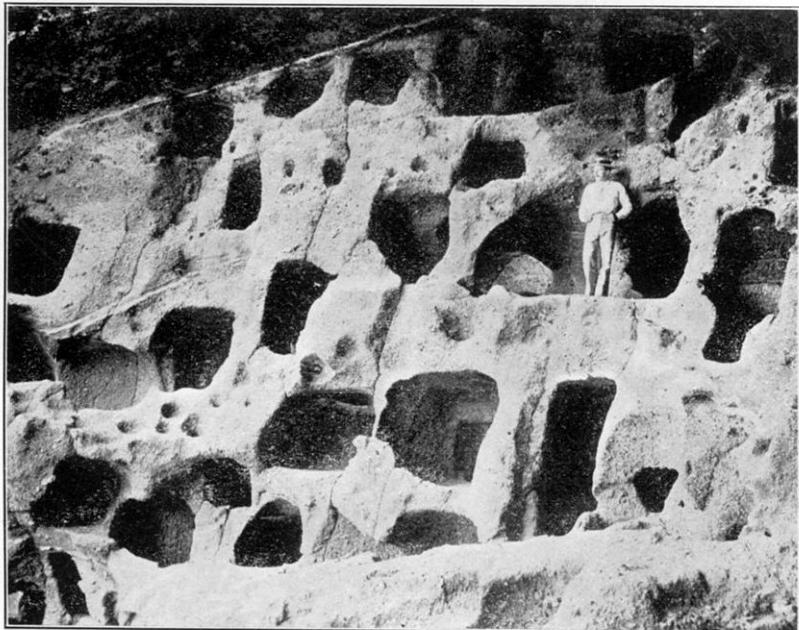
their eyes blink painfully under the glare of full sunlight. Once a week barefoot peasants, usually women, carry the product on their heads (plate XIX, *a*) over the stony paths five or ten miles to the cities, where the largest pots of three- or four-gallons capacity, are sold for about four American cents apiece. A woman usually carries twelve such, so receiving nearly fifty cents as the proceeds of her Sunday trip.

The islanders made excellent butter, and the cheese of Lanzarote received high approval from the earliest invaders. The milk to be churned was put in a skin and suspended between two trees and knocked back and forth between two women standing eight or ten feet apart. This method is still practised in a rural district of Teneriffe, and it is not uncommon to meet a shepherd on the mountains carrying milk in a whole sheepskin. Butter was believed by the Guanches to have great medicinal virtue and was used both externally and internally. It was kept in pots buried in the ground and its efficacy was thought to increase with age. Urns of such butter have been found beside the mummies, and, according to the above theory, should have incalculable healing power.

Fish naturally formed a large part of the dietary of the coast-dwellers. When a school of fish approached Gomera, Canary, or Lanzarote, men, women, and children, armed with sticks, threw themselves into the sea, and, swimming beyond their finny prey, drove it to land where others waited with nets made of reeds and palm-leaves. The Lanzarotans killed fish with sticks, while swimming. They also built near the shore circular stone-walled pits which they emptied with their clay bowls at low tide, so catching the fish which had remained in them. A highly esteemed variety, which reached the length of a foot or more, was so slippery that it could not be held in the hand even an instant. To obtain this, the deep pools left by the retreating tide were poisoned with the juice of a species of *Euphorbia*. The stupefied fish rose to the surface and were caught in baskets lowered beneath them and



*a* — Women of Agaete, Grand Canary, carrying native pottery to market.



*b* — Aboriginal burial caves near the Guia road, Grand Canary.

SCENES IN GRAND CANARY

then freshened in unpoisoned water. Nets were sometimes made of the fibers of the dragon tree and of *Fucus*, and were provided with buoys, weights, and a draw-cord. These were thrown out-spread into deep water, the cord was pulled, and the captors swam with their prey to land. Nuñez de la Pena says that the people of Teneriffe (who could not swim) with little horns for hooks caught many fish, "thanks to the Lord who deprives none of the means of sustenance and aids with His omnipotence the most necessitous, even the barbarians, that they may know Him for Lord and Creator and Omnipotent." Hooks were also made of bone, and sometimes in Grand Canary a piece of bone was perfectly joined to a piece of hardwood by means of a thread of wool or gut. *Fucus* reeds or the branches of the wild cedar served as rods, and the cords were obtained from the palm tree. The Fuerteventurans harpooned fish along the shore, and the Canarios sometimes fished with torches by night.

Though the common drink of the islanders was water or milk, a fermented liquor was prepared from the fruit of the mocan, and in Hierro a kind of wine was made from the berries of *Cerasus*, and in Gomera from dates. In order to have enough milk in Teneriffe for the great consumption by the people, the kids were not allowed to drink much. The mammae of the mothers were smeared with the juice of a species of *Euphorbia*, which formed a kind of glue. In the evening the shepherds dissolved this and, when they had taken all the milk that they needed, the kids were allowed to have the remainder. In drought-devoured Fuerteventura cisterns were riches, and in Hierro water was so great a luxury that in contracts of marriages and in wills the gift of a cistern was more esteemed than a field. Sheep, goats, and swine were taught to quench their thirst by digging and chewing fern-roots. Some say they even drank salt water and sucked the leaves of asphodel. The precious fluid was also obtained by placing troughs upon the mocans at the origin of the first branches so that the dews and vapors deposited upon the leaves might run down into

the little reservoirs placed below. The story of the celebrated fountain tree which distilled sufficient water to supply the population of the whole island (about one thousand souls) during the dry season, would itself fill the limits of a magazine article. According to Viana, it "extracted from the arid earth the copious water which it afterward distilled." Teneriffe and Canary abounded in mineral springs, many of them celebrated today for medicinal qualities. A sulphurous spring on Hierro had such remarkable digestive power that when one had eaten "until he could no more," he had only to drink of it and, within an hour, his appetite would be as keen as before.

#### CLOTHING

Skin garments were in universal use except in a few regions where the poorer men wore only a loin-covering of palm-leaves or of skin, but even then the women were clothed, and tattooing with the colored juices of plants, a primitive form of dress, was probably practised. The custom of doffing the mantle or cloak in battle was probably responsible for the impression received by some of the invaders that the islanders were naked or nearly so.

The Palmans did not know how to cut skins, but considered them ready for use after having dried them in the sun. With this exception the Guanches were skilled tanners and tailors, those of Grand Canary excelling in these respects. A peasant told Dr Chil that the leather of his and his neighbors' shoes was taken from the skin-coverings of the mummies found in the caves near by, and that their sacks and pack-saddles, made from cloth from the same source, had been used in all sorts of weather for twenty years without detriment. Martinez de Escobar declares that some of these mummy-skins compete with Swiss kid in softness and delicacy. Simple designs were sometimes made by the combination of rectangular pieces of white and black skin. A kind of cloth was made from the fibers of dragon-tree roots and

from the leaf bases of palm, stained with vegetal coloring matters. Leather thongs were prepared with sharp stones; the tendons of sheep, goats, or swine, or fibers from the roots of the dragon tree served as thread and are sometimes so fine that a lens is necessary to distinguish the strands. Needles were made of fish bone or of the midrib of the palm-leaf or of wood hardened in fire. Dr Chil thinks that early Phenician navigators may have introduced the real article.

The clothes were cut by tailors who were specialists. Their implements were obsidian knives, which were used also for killing sheep, cutting wood, and shaving. The number and style of the articles of clothing varied in the different islands. It is recorded that Louis XIV performed the Canary dance in the Grand Opera, dressed as a Guanche, with bare legs, skin mantle, and royal wand; and we have gathered from our reading that the prevalent fashion resembled that which the widely circulated portraits of Robinson Crusoe have made familiar.

Considerable attention seems to have been given to the head-dress. The Canarios wore a bonnet made of the whole skin of a goat with the hair outside. The hind legs fell behind the ears, while the front legs were crossed under the chin. Sometimes bonnets were made of skin trimmed with feathers (perhaps at Easter time). The people who lived in houses braided the hair behind the back in a queue, while the troglodytes rolled it on the head or plaited it with colored rushes or put it up inside the bonnet and sometimes dyed it red with lye. The "king" of Lanzarote wore a fantastic, miter-like bonnet adorned with shells, which so took the fancy of the conqueror Bethencourt, that on receiving the title of "King of the Canary Islands," he adopted a somewhat similar crown. The commoners of this island trimmed their goat-skin bonnets with three feathers in front.

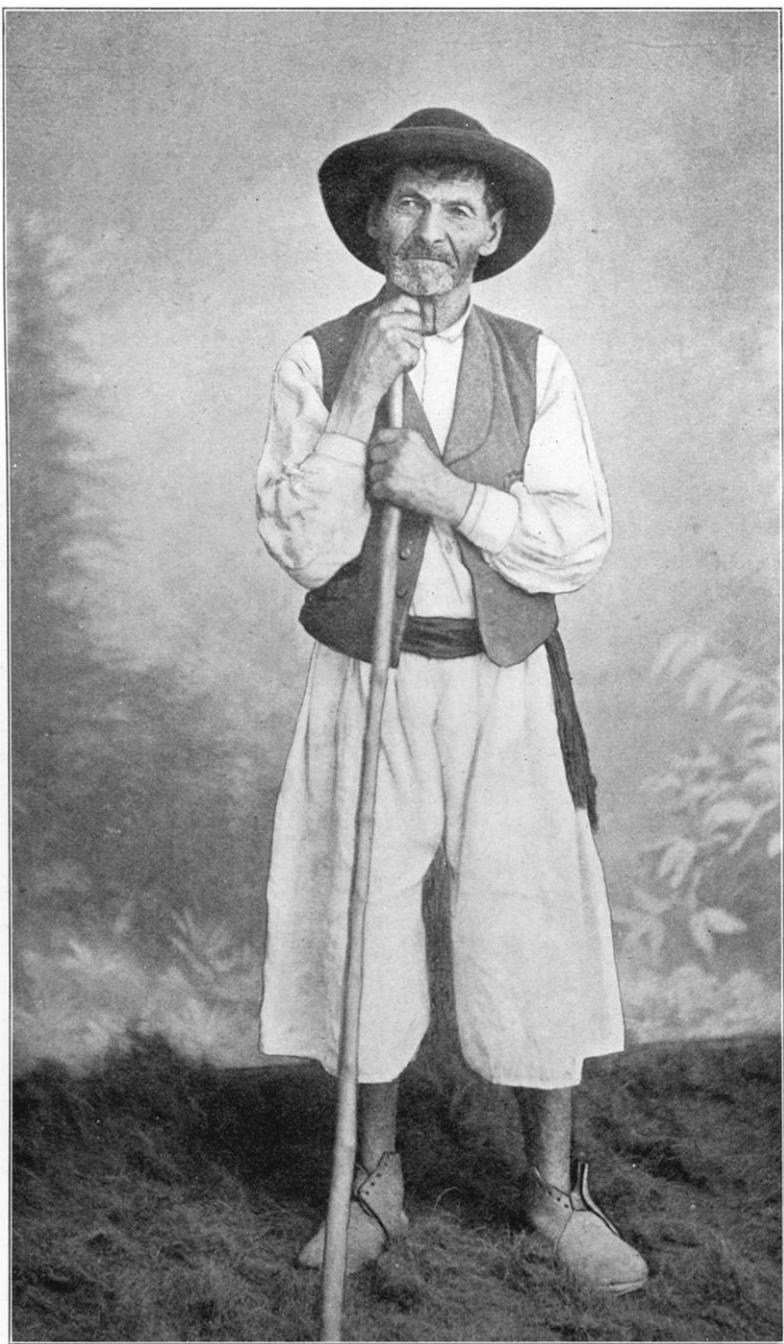
The Canario wore a cloak or jacket of skin with the hair side inward during the winter and outward during the summer, and under this a tight coat or shirt made of rushes beaten until soft

like flax and then woven, reaching to the knees and girded about the waist. Chains of beads of baked earth have been found with the mummies, and may have been either ornaments or currency or both, or they may have been counting-chains of simpler construction than those of Teneriffe where rings of different sizes represented respectively the units, tens, and hundreds.

The Canary peasants of the western side of the isle still have a curious costume, perhaps ancestral, consisting of a loose blouse and full, white, divided skirt which barely reaches the knee. They also wear low rawhide shoes, but no stockings (plate XX). In Teneriffe a long cloak of goat-skin, dressed and softened in butter, was gathered at the top and tied. The Laguna peasant and the shepherd of Canary now wear a coarse blanket which is shirred at the neck and falls below the knees. Is it a survival of the Guanche *tamarca*? The outer garment of the women was longer, and beneath it they wore a petticoat of the same material which covered the feet, "of which they took much care; for it was an immodest thing for women to disclose breast and feet." They wore also a short jacket belted "to make slender the waist," says Viana, and with the addition of a collar of little shells interspersed with amber, felt abundantly justified in the admiration of their contemporaries. The higher classes on all the islands wore sandals or shoes of various styles made of skins sometimes dressed with the hair and sometimes stained red or blue. Some of them much resemble Moorish sandals, and Ignatius Donnelly remarks that the sandals of a prehistoric statue discovered in New Mexico are "exact representations of those found on the feet of the Guanches." There is not, however, chance for infinite variety in the general plan of a sandal.

#### HABITATIONS AND FURNITURE

Not all of the Guanches were troglodytes, though they preferred caves to houses and well knew how to take the best advantage of the porous lava formations in which their homes were



A PEASANT OF THE VICINITY OF GUIA, GRAND CANARY

excavated (plate xxi). On the site of the present church of Galder was once a royal cave, and near by are the remains of another with rude interior decorations still visible. In Canary, Hierro, Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, and, very rarely, in Palma, remains of buildings have been found. In all cases they were of the cyclopean class of architecture, made of great blocks massed together without cement, often cut and fitted and polished with such skill that the "interior appeared as if whitened with gypsum." The stones were sometimes so large that it "seemed impossible that men could have placed them one above another." A certain royal palace had walls three feet thick and was lined with planks "so well placed and curiously painted that at first sight they seemed to be all of one piece. . . . Only this house and palace of the king, in order that it might be different from the others of the village, was lined in this manner."

Roofs were ordinarily made of branches of trees covered with ferns and straw, but in Canary they were of solid beams of hard-wood placed very close together and themselves covered with a well-adjusted layer of flat stones; above was another layer of earth and dry herbs, and over all a plastering of mud so densely packed that long-continued rain could not penetrate. In Agaete there is a house of the indigenes still inhabited, its wooden roof perfect after three centuries of exposure to wind and weather. Another in Tiraxana serves the purpose of a blacksmith's forge.

The buildings were circular or oval in form, more rarely rectangular, low, with a single very narrow doorway and no partitions internally,—"all after the style of an oven, without corral or court, without window to lighten them." In Fuerteventura and Lanzarote there were sometimes exterior courts for the inclosure of the flocks. The doors both of houses and caves were merely sticks placed across the entrance, or were made of planks and opened or shut by means of a stick. Each house in Hierro sheltered about twenty families. The streets of Canary were

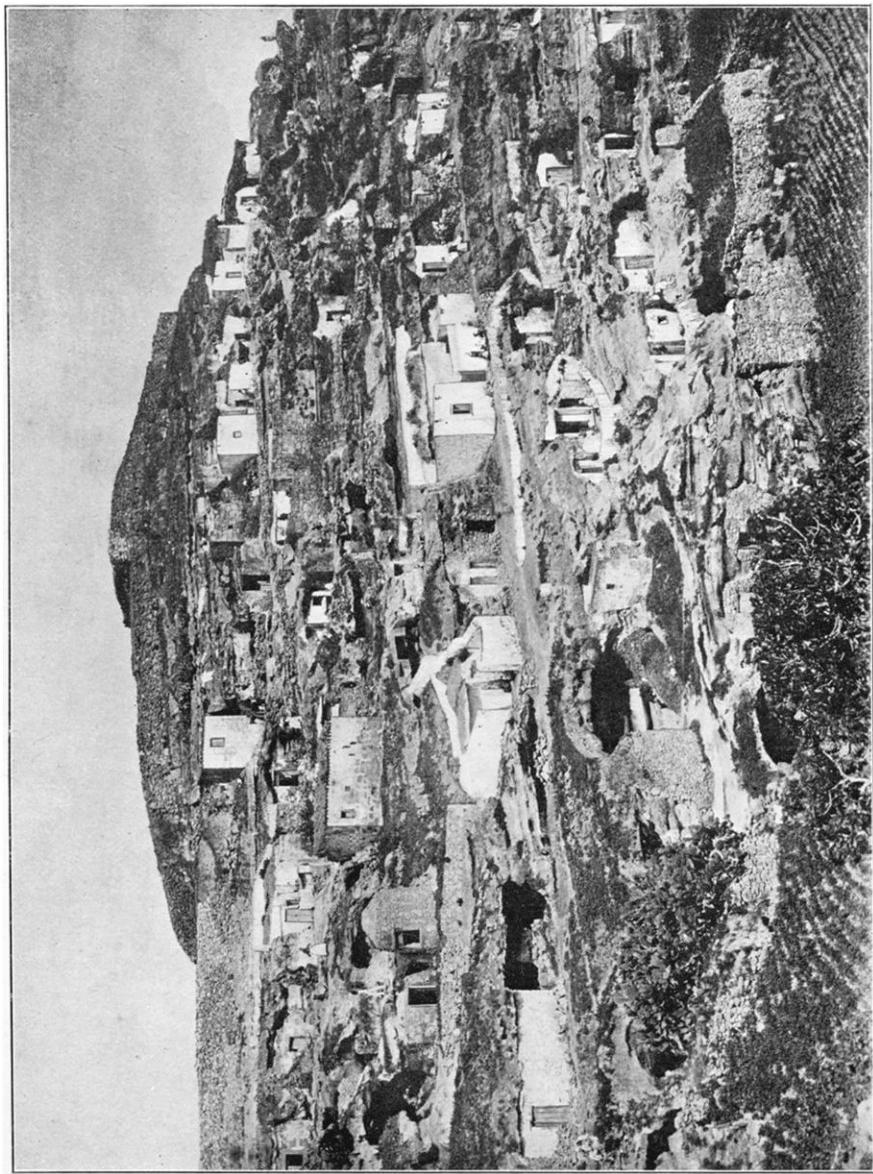
"very narrow and paved with very fine pebbles." The great trees used in the building of the houses were felled by fire.

The caves were opened with sharp-pointed stones and with others perforated in the center and fitted with handles to be used as hammers. The chaplains of Bethencourt mention a ruined city found in the ravine of Aguiniguin (Grand Canary). Several rows of houses surrounded a great circle in the midst of which were the remains of a large building. Before its door stood a great semicircular bench of stone. The houses were elliptical and the laurel beams of the roof remained in some cases. The uncemented walls were eight or nine feet thick, with alcoves, probably beds, in the interior. The ruins of the so-called "castle of Zoramás," in Lanzarote, consisted of similar cyclopean blocks of stone forming a circle. The houses of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote were partly subterranean, as was the case sometimes in Grand Canary, for the sake of warmth.

Floor mats were made of palms and rushes. The table was a flat stone, the chairs smaller ones; the beds were of skins dressed with the hair on and sometimes placed upon a substratum of herbs, ferns, straw, or grass. Leather bags and rush baskets hung from wooden pegs in the walls, while cooking pots adorned the floor.

#### HUNTING AND STOCK-RAISING

The Guanches were skilled hunters within the limits prescribed by the small variety of animals available for food. Wild pigeons were a favorite article of diet, and the birds were killed in full flight with stones. There were no ferocious mammals, but the hunting of wild goats afforded opportunity for the display of much skill and endurance. Dogs were trained to discover their hiding-places among the rocks and, when routed, the sportsmen pursued their prey over the greatest asperities and along the most dangerous precipices of the mountains. At certain seasons the Fuerteventurans held a "meet" to drive a flock of wild goats into an inclosed place where those needed for food and for the



VILLAGE OF MODERN CAVE-DWELLERS, SOUTHWEST OF LAS PALMAS, GRAND CANARY

sake of the skins were slaughtered. Goats were domesticated on most of the islands. Sheep and pigs were numerous. The sheep of Palma were of a peculiar straight-wool kind, while those of Canary were hairless. The shepherds of Teneriffe knew every sheep among a thousand and counted their flocks without moving the lips or pointing. The Canarios had a well-developed system of counting to the hundreds.

#### AGRICULTURE—TENURE OF LAND

The Guanches were, par excellence, farmers. Even the kings did not disdain the work of agriculture. The plants cultivated were wheat, corn, rye, barley, and legumes. In Lanzarote barley was the only grain; in Palma, as stated above, there was no cereal of any kind, the roots of the common brake and the fruits of *Malva* serving as substitutes. The ground is still exceedingly fertile, and there are ordinarily two or three harvests a year in Canary and Teneriffe. Bethencourt's chaplains said: "The land yields two harvests of wheat each year without any enriching, so that however badly it is worked and cultivated, the earth provides every kind of abundant fruits." The ground was furrowed with a goat's horn fastened to a spur or tooth at the end of a stick, and in Canary plowing bees were an established custom. Men hoed; women sowed and probably reaped also. Threshing was done either with the feet or with sticks, and in Fuerteventura and Lanzarote the grain was winnowed with the hands. The women of Canary sifted the ground meal through sieves made of reed and palm with a bottom of leather perforated by means of a hot stick.

The land of Teneriffe and Canary was divided among the people according to the rank and needs of the families, and after harvest was returned to the king "without rent, tribute, or gift." According to another author the division in Teneriffe was for life, the grant increasing with the growth of the family.

## FESTIVALS AND DANCES

Harvest feasts were the chief social functions of the Guanches. In Teneriffe civil wars were suspended during these celebrations; people went from tribe to tribe rejoicing together, and personal feuds were often permanently healed.

There were four recognized seasons in Teneriffe, and every year, at the end of April, a nine days' feast was held at the royal palace to which all came at the king's expense. The favorite pastimes were dancing, wrestling, running, and jumping. Music was furnished with tambourines, instruments made of calabashes containing little stones, and timbrels of the wood of the dragon tree covered with skins. The taste for music was universal. When Betheñcourt returned to Fuerteventura the second time, he brought with him minstrels who played during the feast to which the two kings of the island had been invited. Their royal highnesses were so transported with joy at the sweet sounds that they forgot to eat. No greater evidence of appreciation could have been given by men blessed with the phenomenal appetites with which their race was credited. The still popular *campo* or country dances are a distinct inheritance from the Guanche festivals. The men and women without touching approach, recede, revolve, constantly moving their hands above their heads, snapping their fingers, leaping in time to the music, and singing the weird, monotonous island air to the accompaniment of the stamping of feet, clapping of hands, or whistling of the spectators. An old writer, Francisco de Gomera, says: "Two things go through the world which have ennobled these islands: the Canary birds so esteemed for their song, and the *Canario*, a dance graceful, elegant, and ingenious."

The inhabitants of Hierro have a distinct ancestral dance, in its melancholy character reflecting the temperament of the people. The participants join hands and, moving around in a circle, sing songs so plaintive that they are said sometimes to weep bitterly because of the sentiment of the verse. The warlike

Gomerans celebrated the exploits of their heroes in chants, and Azmara affirms that they passed the greater part of their time in singing and dancing. Feasts were sometimes held by the light of the moon or by firelight and often near the seashore. After the dancing there was refreshment of roasted or fried meat and then "each one returned to his own dwelling." There were also houses where the people of Canary met to dance and sing, and the beginning of the year in that island (June 21st) was a festal occasion celebrated by feasts and marriages.

#### ESTHETICS

The Guanches had no well-developed artistic taste. Viana mentions a portrait painted on wood with charcoal, ocher, the juices of herbs, and the milk of the wild fig tree. The walls of the royal palace in Galdar are decorated with rude designs in color, and some of the old pottery exhibits ornamental tendencies, being as well made as that of the present time. We have already mentioned the blue and red tattooing practised in Canary and the dyeing of cloth, but none of this work endangers the reputation of Michelangelo or of Worth. The islanders were fond of perfume, and they adorned their houses and public places with flowers and leaves.

#### WAR CUSTOMS

But above all things the islanders were fond of fighting, with the single exception of the natives of Hierro, who knew no war and had no weapons unless their long leaping-poles were used as such when occasion demanded. Tribal boundaries furnished endless cause of provocation and kept the warriors in good practice, but at the same time so reduced their numbers as to make it possible for the Spaniards eventually to conquer them.

There were about five thousand fighting men in Canary and nearly as many in Teneriffe when the foreigners came, and it required almost a century for these armored, civilized warriors to subdue the "savages" dependent on stones and wooden lances.

They proved themselves fertile in stratagem, quick to recover from defeat, of unconquerable courage and tireless valor. The women accompanied the men in war to prepare food, care for the wounded, provide new weapons, promote courage in the encounter, and, not seldom, to share in it. In almost inaccessible caves reserves of stones and arms were carefully guarded. Their weapons were sticks with the points hardened in fire and made very sharp, sometimes with two little balls in the middle where the hand was placed, and with little spines at the end which broke in the wound, or sometimes armed with a ball at each end. Their javelins were eight or ten feet long. With this latter implement D<sup>r</sup>amas pierced the heart of a mounted Spaniard after it had traversed his coat of mail. They threw sharp stones with great skill. The coat or cloak, rolled on the left arm, served as a shield. After the coming of the Europeans the Canarios made shields, in imitation of those of their enemies, from dragon-tree bark, and swords of pine hardened and so tempered by fire as to cut almost like steel. On discovering the destructive power of European weapons, they considered that wounds were deadly in proportion to the noise of the discharge producing them, and therefore in battle imitated with the mouth the sounds made by the crossbows and harquebuses of the Spaniards. Before fighting they anointed the body with the juices of plants mixed with fat or with sheep's oil. They communicated by means of signal fires and by whistling sentinels who could be heard for miles. It is said that in 1615 an English traveler, who asked the descendant of a Guanche to whistle in his ear, was deaf for fifteen days in consequence. During battle the air rang with shouts and whistles.

Constant harassment by the slave-making raids of foreigners developed the strategic powers of the islanders. One contrivance of the Canarios to surprise the enemy was to keep tamed gulls in and about the shore villages. When barks approached such places, an ambush was set and several of the birds were tied to the roofs of houses. The invaders, seeing gulls about, would

conclude the village to be deserted, go boldly up, and come no more back. Again, when boats were seen, a few men were sent to collect mollusks along the shore, the others remaining concealed. The supposed stragglers, when pursued, led the foe into the ambush. Women, old people, and children were protected in war; pillage was forbidden, and places of worship were not molested. Treaties were kept, and the shameless treachery of the foreigners was a source of great amazement to their uncultured foes. By no open means could they have been subdued, and, to the end of the hopeless, one-sided struggle, their heroism and patriotism shone with ever-brightening luster. Their leaders were men who would have won a people's love and honor in any land — proud, true, and dauntless. When Doramas, the great hero of Grand Canary, was wounded and taken prisoner, some of his followers voluntarily surrendered in order to attend him and be present at his death. In 1493, Lugo, having subdued Palma, went to Teneriffe and sent to Bencomo, the chief of the *menceys* (kings), to accept the Spanish friendship, sovereignty, and religion. Bencomo replied: "I know not how to refuse my friendship to one who has done me no wrong; as to the new religion, I cannot embrace it without understanding it; and concerning obedience required towards other men, know that the *menceys* of Teneriffe never debase themselves."

Their magnanimity in success equaled their courage in defeat, and both put to shame the perfidy of their slaughterers. A Spanish captain was captured and sent to Bencomo with the request that he be punished. The chief replied: "Friends, free this man, for I cannot show my valor against one alone. Free him, and when he comes with his followers I will punish him." This was at a time when the Guanche camp was devastated by a great pestilence which killed over a hundred men each month, and the life of an enemy was of tenfold value. After the conquest this same captain married Bencomo's daughter. It is to be hoped that he repaid his debt of gratitude by life-long devotion.

Love of country was so deep in these untaught men that when resistance to the invaders was seen to be useless, the king of Galdar, the *faycan* of Telde, and others threw themselves into the sea rather than submit to the foreign yoke.

#### MARRIAGE AND KINDRED CUSTOMS

With the exception of the Lanzarotans, the islanders were monogamic, but if matrimony proved unpleasant, separation was allowable and a new conjugal relation was not prohibited, although in Teneriffe the children of the first marriage were not considered legitimate. If the king of Teneriffe could not find his equal, he was obliged to marry his sister to prevent the admixture of plebeian blood. Others might marry whom they would, except mother or sister, and the suitor asked his bride of her father or, if he was not living, referred the great question to herself. The custom of throwing grain in the faces of the newly wed is as old as the Guanches. There were no class distinctions in Hierro, and only the king was limited in his choice of a wife to one of royal lineage. The bride was usually obtained by a gift of flocks or of cattle. If a family became too large for the means of the parents, the supernumerary children were taken by other families and rarely left to public charity. When a babe was born, before being allowed to take milk it was given roasted fern-roots bruised and mixed with butter. Even in the time of Glas, the middle of the eighteenth century, a similar custom prevailed, the first meal of a baby consisting of roasted meal mixed with bruised cheese. Also in Hierro, Gomera, and Palma little brushes made of the macerated roots of *Pteris* were dipped in milk or butter and given to the babies to suck.

The daughters of Canario nobles were sent to the convents of vestals situated on high, secluded mountains until they reached the marriageable age of twenty years. They were taught by "old women of good life" to cut and adorn skins, to make mats and baskets of reeds, to draw threads from the tendons of goats,

and to make needles of the spines and bones of fish. If a damsel erred, the ancient matron who conducted the school called together the pupils and said, "If I were the daughter of such and such parents [naming those of the girl in question], and had committed this fault [naming it], I should merit this punishment"—and thereupon she struck the ground several times with a bunch of rods, and with this they remained very tearful and much benefited.

The boys were taught by men. They knew no letters, but used a kind of coarse painting. They learned the careers of their kings and illustrious men, lineages, agricultural lore, the signs of the weather, and the approved methods of foretelling future events. They were spanked with little bunches of reeds when occasion demanded, or, for grave offenses, whipped on the shoulders.

The lover asked his bride of her father, who referred the decision to her. The marriage ceremony was the occasion for a feast of several days' duration, but for thirty days preceding, the girl was kept in a reclining position and fed heartily on fattening foods, for nobody wanted a lean wife.<sup>1</sup> Her parents then took her to the sea and bathed her several times, after which she was presented to the lord of the district. If she pleased him he kept her for one night; otherwise he delivered her to one of the nobles. If a child came from this primeval morganatic connection, it was a matter of congratulation and the baby was considered noble. This strange custom resulted in the over-population of the island, and Gomez Escudero declares that after some years of famine a law was passed commanding the slaughter of all girl babies with the exception of the first-born. Dr Chil seriously doubts the existence of any such cruel enactment, and it was certainly not long enforced, for an epidemic which destroyed one third of the population soon rendered it inexpedient.

One of the first duties of hospitality in Canary and Gomera

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<sup>1</sup> This was customary in Lanzarote also.

was for the host to offer his wife to his guest. Refusal of the courtesy was considered an insult. In consideration of these things it seems paradoxical, yet it is true, that the Canarios held womankind in highest esteem. One who lost her virtue was ostracized, and for the rest of her life no one spoke to her. If a man met a woman in a solitary place he was forbidden to speak to her; there were, indeed, sometimes separate roads for the two sexes. There were also bathing places set aside for the use of women to which no man might approach without severe punishment. To these women went alone, but never elsewhere without a companion. Second marriages were not prohibited in Canary, but the children of a noble by his second wife were not considered noble unless made so by the act of the *guanarteme* (king). Among the Gomerans the sons of sisters and brothers, rather than a man's own children, inherited his property, perhaps because the customs of married life already referred to rendered it somewhat difficult to ascertain who were a man's own children. Many of the women of Lanzarote had three husbands, who held the position in turn by months, the one next to succeed to the honor serving until his time came to be lord. The babes there were nourished from the mouth, causing a prolongation of the mother's lower lip "which was very ugly to see."

#### MEDICINE

The herb-tea-and-bleeding school of medicine ruled without competition. A decoction made from the fruit of the mocan tree was in favor. The body was burned or cut to let blood for the curing of acute pains, and the wound afterward dressed with butter. Wounds were also cauterized. In Hierro the sick were anointed with butter and covered with skins to induce perspiration. In Palma, when sickness or extreme age showed death to be near, the friends were called and the dying man said, "I wish to die." This request was religiously observed, and he was carried to a sepulchral cave chosen by himself, laid upon a bed of

skins with his head to the north and a vase of milk put beside him; then the entrance of the cave was closed and he was left to fight his last battle alone. Truly Viera well called the Palmans the "Spartans of the Canaries." A chief of this island was captured by the Spanish and sent home as a trophy of war, but, unwilling to survive the disgrace, he refused food and died of starvation.

#### MORTUARY CUSTOMS

If, as Dr Chil thinks, the care of the dead is an index of the belief of a people in immortality, the Guanches of Grand Canary and Teneriffe must be esteemed highly religious. Mummies have been found in the caves of these islands which rival those of Egypt in the perfection of their preservation. Not all of the dead were embalmed, however. Those of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote were simply buried in tombs of stone within caves, the wealthy only being wrapped in skins. Embalming was occasionally practised in Palma and Hierro, but probably not so skilfully as in the two central islands. The bodies in Palma were ordinarily laid in caves, upon skins, because "neither the earth nor anything pertaining to it should touch the body of the dead." In Hierro a board was placed at the feet and a leaping-pole by the side, and the entrance to the cave was closed "that the crows might not eat the body." In certain parts of Teneriffe — for example, in the cemeteries of Guia, — corpses never decomposed. Laid in the midst of a lava bed, they were very soon thoroughly dried by the sun. The poor, wrapped in the mantle ordinarily worn in life, were buried in such places or were simply put away in a cave. In Canary, likewise, the dead were often buried in the *malpais* (lava beds). The graves were sometimes lined and covered with pine planks, above which were placed stones six feet long with small ones closely filling the interstices. The head of the body was turned toward the north in the tombs of the Isleta, but in some smaller sepulchers in Aguiniguin some

corpses were laid east and west. The Canarios "considered it a great crime to inter in the pure earth, lest worms should eat the dead." Seeds of *Cneorum* were commonly found with the bodies, probably to prevent putrefaction. Nobles were sometimes buried in an upright position, clothed in the garments worn in life. The remains of Guanche cemeteries may still be seen on the Isleta near Las Palmas and at Agaete. Amidst the waste of black volcanic stones by the seaside are the rifled sepulchers of the nameless dead—great square heaps of stones and empty pits eloquent of what is not there. The ocean waves beat ceaselessly a funeral chant; majestic mountains stand guard over the old heroes; like Timon's is their resting-place, and perhaps not less tragic than his was their life.

But the better classes both in Canary and in Teneriffe embalmed their dead with great care and then interred them in sepulchral caves. The wealthy had their own family caves, and others were set apart for the reception of the kings. It is said that there were more than twenty grottoes where the princes and nobles of Teneriffe were buried, but their entrances were known only to the initiated. Viana (about 1772) obtained admission to one of these where he saw more than a thousand mummies deposited upon planks and showing not the slightest sign of corruption. The kings were laid uncovered in the royal sepulchers in the order of their reigns. Mummies were sometimes put into coffins from which the feet protruded.

Some years ago the builders of the government road which skirts the northern coast of Grand Canary encountered one of these secret places. The excavations loosened a part of the mountain side and a great mass of earth and stones fell, disclosing a honeycomb of cave openings (plate XIX, *b*). On exploration there were found to be three hundred and sixty-five connected compartments, most of them containing human remains. A great part of this archeological treasure was removed to Las Palmas. There are now only about two hundred of the chambers, and all

of the human remains have disappeared. One finds it hard to understand how the ancient people reached them. Probably the excavators and burial officials were lowered by ropes to the scene of their work, where, midway between heaven and earth—seen only by soaring hawks or eagles—they pursued their lonely calling.

The cleaners of corpses lived isolated and despised. Women prepared the bodies of women, men those of men. During the process, which lasted from fifteen to twenty days, the body was watched night and day to prevent the ravages of ravens and other creatures. The husband or wife or nearest relative of the deceased meanwhile supplied the cleaners with food. When the body had been thoroughly cleansed and dried, the actual embalmers—a class not despised—began their work. Sometimes the relatives themselves wrapped it in skins so marked that the individual was recognizable. Clay vases full of milk or butter, dried figs or dragon-blood paste, and wooden jars of honey were put beside the dead. Other things found in the sepulchers were hatchets, battle-sticks, fish-hooks, clay beads, vases, clay molds for stamps perhaps used in tattooing, basaltic stones cut into pyramidal form and carved with transverse lines and lozenge-shape figures, and perforated disks made of the spirals of shells. All of these are analogous to objects found in the prehistoric caves of Spain. Cereals of various kinds, among which wheat has been recognized with certainty, were also taken from the tombs.

The mummies were most excellently preserved and were as light as straw. They "wanted neither hairs nor teeth." Nerves and tendons, finger- and toe-nails were distinguishable. The skin was undestroyed. Some of the bodies were stretched at full length, "others seated, women with children at the breast, all very dry, so that the features were almost recognizable, though they had been thus very many years." The wrappings, in number from one to twelve, when removed, perfectly retained the form of the body, and, as has already been said, were as

strong as if newly made. Skins were not always used. Many bodies were covered with a coarse cloth woven of macerated *Fucus* fibers and tendons, outside of which reed mats were wrapped. The cloth was often a yard and a half in width, proving that the islanders understood a primitive kind of weaving. It appears that at the time of the conquest embalming was not commonly practised, for the most remarkable of the numerous volcanic caves used as sepulchers are in the torrents of modern lava at Icod de los Vinos which contain many unembalmed human skeletons.

The dead were not forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Pilgrimages were made to the tombs which were in certain sacred rocks, as, for instance, Tirma in Canary. The visitor, on entering, saluted, saying, "Here comes the guest." The answer came, "Let him be welcomed." Whether such pilgrims brought offerings is not recorded; but it is stated that odoriferous woods were sometimes burned in pits in memory of the dead.

#### COSMOGONY

Espinosa writes that the Guanches believed that in the beginning God created a certain number of men and women with the earth and the water to be divided among them and the flocks necessary to their existence. Afterward He created others, but gave them nothing, and when they claimed a share of this world's goods, God said, "Serve the others and they will give you." Hence came masters and servants, nobles and retainers.

#### GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Until shortly before the time of the conquest Teneriffe was one consolidated monarchy governed by two kings—one living, one dead. The latter remained until his successor died, when his

<sup>1</sup> Pedro Gomez Escudero assures us that the islanders prayed to the spirits of their ancestors, which were supposed to cross the sea to give them counsel, and were visible on the longest days of the year as little clouds on the horizon. Great feasts were held in their honor.

body was removed to the common resting-place of kings, or, according to one authority, was thrown into a pit. The last king of the whole island was Tinerfe, or Chinerfe, from whom it may have been named. Notwithstanding the usual custom of the succession of brothers rather than of sons, his kingdom was usurped and subdivided before his death by his nine sons, and the tribes so formed were at constant warfare with one another.

When a new *mencey*, as the ruler was called, came to the throne, the people assembled in the place of public meetings. Amid general acclamation, he passed over the flower-strewn ground to the throne—a stone covered with skins. Then one of his relatives presented to him the royal humerus (the bone of the right arm, or, according to others, the skull of the chief of the reigning dynasty) which served as a scepter and was carefully preserved in a leather case. The *mencey* bowed respectfully before it, then, lifting it above his head, took the oath of office: “I swear by the bone of him who has borne the crown, to follow his example and to seek the happiness of my subjects.” The chiefs, in the order of age, taking the humerus, said: “We swear by the day of your coronation to constitute ourselves your defenders as those of your race.” The king was then given a crown of laurel mixed with flowers, and a great festival followed at the expense of his majesty.

Cadamosto relates the fable of certain men throwing themselves from cliffs into the sea on the occasion of a coronation, their descendants being rewarded by the king for this mark of devotion. When the *mencey* traveled or moved from his winter home on the seacoast to his summer cave in the cool inland heights, he was preceded by a courier bearing a stick with a banner of reeds on the end, and accompanied by his councilors. When the people saw the royal standard, they ran to prostrate themselves before their prince, and the most enthusiastic wiped the dust from his sandals with the lining of their robes and then kissed his feet. The anniversary of the coronation was always

observed with pomp. The subjects rendered homage by kissing the feet of their king and by bringing to him gifts of skins, fruit, and flowers. The richest were permitted to kiss his left hand, the chiefs his right, but all kneeled to him, saying, "I am thy vassal."

Class distinctions were closely preserved in Teneriffe, and there were clearly specialized occupations corresponding to them. Nobles were farmers and the owners of flocks; potters dwelt in the hillside caves; tailors cut skin garments with stone knives; carpenters were characterized as *limpios en su traje*; cleaners and embalmers of dead bodies and also butchers constituted the scum of society. Even criminals objected to associating with these last in prison, therefore their misdemeanors were tried at once and punished immediately by whipping in the court of justice. A follower of this trade could make known his wants only by pointing to the articles required, for his touch carried pollution—an ostracism which is continued to this day in a somewhat modified degree. Executioners were likewise execrated here as on the other islands. There was also a class of midwives in Teneriffe who lived together in caves, going out only when called. Some say they were not allowed to marry anyone, others that by the act of washing the head of a new-born babe and bestowing its name they contracted relationship with the father and could not marry him. When asked whence this custom was derived, they only answered, "So it is done." The Hamaguadas<sup>1</sup> of Canary performed similar offices for the children there. All of these received pay in grain, meat, or legumes, money being unknown. Exchange of commodities was facilitated by fairs held at appointed places. There were weights for grain and measurements for cloth. The men only did the bargaining, conducting transactions with a good faith which "attracted the attention of the invaders."

Justice was administered by the king seated on his throne in

<sup>1</sup> See page 491.

the *tagorer*. Murderers were ostracized and their possessions confiscated, capital punishment being forbidden on the ground that God alone who gave life had the right to take it away. Robbers were compelled to do menial work, such as killing and skinning goats, or were bastinadoed with the pastoral staff of the prince who himself saw that the wounds were afterward dressed. The adulterer was buried alive, the girl remaining in prison until someone promised to marry her. Children who insulted their parents were stoned. Cowardice was punished by law, as was also failure to respect sacred personages. When a criminal was condemned none prayed for another, nor was the king appeased by presents, nor by intercessions, nor by tears, but the sentence was executed within two hours. "So all lived with love and loyalty for each other."

The Guanches of Teneriffe were chivalrous in the extreme. If a man met a woman in a solitary place he stood aside to let her pass and could not look at her nor speak unless she first addressed him. Transgression of this law was severely punished. When a person went to the house of another, he seated himself on the stone before the door and whistled or sang until invited to enter. To go in unbidden was a punishable offense.

The inhabitants of Grand Canary were for a long period divided into ten tribes, but during the fourteenth century these were united under the control of one woman. Her two grandsons, with the title of *guanarteme*, had divided the temporal power at the time of the conquest, while the spiritual power was shared by two so-called *faycans* or *faycags*.

Each *guanarteme* had six advisers, and these held yearly joint councils where the princes presided seated upon their thrones, the nobles sitting on lower stones at each side. Besides these chiefs there was a governing assembly of not fewer than one hundred nor more than two hundred warriors who preserved the religious rites and secrets. When five or six had died, successors were chosen from among men who had never contracted alliance with

inferiors, and these were confirmed by the *faycan*. The aspirant to nobility must be the descendant of a noble, the possessor of flocks, and physically able to carry arms. On the day appointed, he appeared before the warriors with his hair flowing over his shoulders. The *faycan* said : "All you who hear me, I conjure you in the name of God, to declare if you have seen such and such a one, the son of such and such a one, enter into a slaughter house to take or to kill goats, if you have seen him prepare his repast with his own hands, commit rapine in time of peace, or show disloyalty or insolence in word or action, especially toward women." If no one condemned the young man, the *faycan* cut his hair over his ears and a little above his shoulders, and armed him with a javelin ; his beard was allowed to grow and he was noble. If anyone testified against him, his hair was shaved and he became plebeian for life. The native aristocracy of Canary lived inland, the poor near the sea. Each village had two youths chosen respectively to serve as object-lesson of the good and the bad.

Crimes were tried by judges chosen for their great virtues, who rigorously administered the traditional code. They were distributed over the island and were paid by fees of fruit. Those who judged the nobles were themselves of noble birth ; they wore long hair, and their sentences were executed by night. Commoners were tried by men of their own class and suffered punishment by day, but the law was the same for all. In each village there were persons whose duty it was to accuse the wrong-doers of the neighborhood. The murderer was taken to the seashore and placed with his chest upon a flat stone while the executioner threw another great stone upon his shoulders, crushing the ribs and vital organs. The housebreaker and the adulterer also were put to death, while the revolutionist was thrown from a cliff into the sea. Lying was a punishable offense.

Taxes were collected by officials who delivered them to the *faycans* to be distributed to the needy. Grain was stored for use in case of famine, in fresh cool caves on the mountain tops or

buried beneath the floors of dwellings in a pit covered with an enormous stone.

The people of Palma were divided into twelve tribes, each ruled by a chief, and constantly at war with one another. If a man was insulted he called his friends and publicly retaliated in the same manner, "after which all took up residence in a different place." While the Teneriffians were "very good friends of their word" and the Canarios astonished the conquerors by their truthfulness, the Palmans rewarded a skilfully told lie and praised adroit pillage — Spartans in these as in more laudable respects.

The people of Hierro, governed by one king, "lived at peace among themselves." With the exception of the king, all were on perfect equality, and he received only voluntary contributions from his subjects. The murderer suffered the same death which he had inflicted. The first theft was punished by putting out one eye, the second by putting out the other.

The Gomerans, according to Azmara, "followed no law and only believed that there is a God." There were among them seven hundred fighting men commanded by a "duke" and certain chiefs, but shortly before the coming of Bethencourt the island was divided into four tribes whose chiefs had the title of "saint."

In Lanzarote and Fuerteventura there was absolute hereditary government, probably regardless of sex. The latter island was divided into two hostile tribes, separated by the narrow isthmus which constricts the island near its southern extremity. In both countries murder was punished by stretching the criminal on the ground with his head pillow'd on a stone while another large stone was dropped upon it. The traitor was stoned and his body burned. Rights of property were protected and inherited; infamy was also hereditary. In Lanzarote law had no power over one who entered the house of an enemy by the door, even though he came with murderous intent; but if he jumped over the wall to attack him unexpectedly, he was killed as a traitor. Warriors distinguished by special acts of bravery, however, were

a law unto themselves and exempt from all the conventionalities of common life. Land taxes defrayed the expenses of the sovereign of this isle.

#### RELIGION

It has already been indicated that the Canary islanders were a religious people. The Teneriffians believed in Inferno, but not for sinners; they located it in the great crater or deep in the earth, and thought that there the genius of evil suffered unending tortures. They swore by Inferno, by the sun, and by the bones of their ancestors. Cadamosto states (on what authority we do not know) that the Guanches of Teneriffe had nine kinds of idolatry, some worshiping the sun, others the moon, others stars. God was described as good, omnipotent, wise, the supporter of Heaven and Earth. In times of drought the shepherds took their flocks to a certain deep valley. The little ones were separated from their mothers and the hills reechoed with wailing. "The shepherd people whose hopes lay in their flocks believed that this intercession of the innocent victims of the famine would appeal to Heaven." Meanwhile the men and women cried aloud and danced around a pole stuck in the ground, not eating until rain fell. The following incident illustrates the tenacity of their beliefs: An exploring party sent out by Lugo, brought back a woman and child. They wished to baptize the baby, but the mother insisted that he must remain of the same religion as herself, and when the Spaniards persisted in their purpose, she took him to a cliff and jumped with him into the ocean.

The Canarios were monotheistic, believing in the reward of the good and the punishment of the bad. According to Marin y Cubas, they swore by the sun; they considered the soul immortal and capable of suffering anxiety, sorrow, hunger, and thirst, and therefore carried food to the sepulchers of their dead; they believed that the devil appeared visibly under various forms, his favorite habitation, as in Teneriffe, being the body of a woolly

dog, and they worshiped him in sacred places in mountains, forests, houses, and on rocks, by all of which they solemnly swore. Upon a high rock near Tiraxana there were three great braziers where sacrifices of fruits were burned, the direction of the smoke being considered prophetic.

Not long ago there was discovered at the top of the mountain of Cuatro Puertas, a great cave eighty feet square, with four entrances each fourteen feet high and six feet wide, separated by pillars seven to nine feet thick. Before these entrances was a circular space, and on the south side of the mountain a much larger circle crossed by semicircular furrows and large ditches. There were also the remains of a gigantic wall, a masterpiece of ancient construction. It appears that here was a place of worship—perhaps the home of the Maguas, or Hamaguadas, sacred women supported by the voluntary contributions of the nobles. They left the houses or caves in which they lived only in case of famine and on certain fixed days when they went to the sea to bathe; and if by chance any man met them then, he lost his life. "Only when they went to worship at Tirma was it permissible to gaze on them from afar." They wore white robes of skin which swept the ground. After reaching the age of thirty years they might marry, but any failure in virtue before that time was punished by imprisonment and starving to death in a stone cell.

Don Pedro del Castillo describes a convent of vestals situated on the steep rocks of the ravine of Valeron. It consisted of one great room, with little cells one above the other along its sides, each with an opening toward the ravine. Two large towers with interior staircases stood before the grotto. The temples were kept by vestals who daily sprinkled them with the milk of goats set apart for the purpose, from which the kids were not taken. The temples and the surrounding precincts were places of refuge for criminals and their flocks, "and therefore were very much inhabited."

Cedefio says that there were also religious men who lived

together in caves and houses of earth, and were supported by tithes given them by the community. In years of scarcity they took no tithes to keep, but distributed them among the poor and themselves ate what had been saved in preceding years. They "always succored the poor with alms, although this was rather the duty of the lord of the land." In times of famine they prayed with uplifted hands to the one omnipotent God. The Maguas did the same, and the people gathered the flocks produced from the tithe offering and shut them in a corral without food for three days. Then, if no rain came, they were given "very little" to eat and again imprisoned.

There were two sacred rocks—one, Tirma, in the district of Galdar, the other, Umiaya, in the district of Telde. To these the people went in procession in times of trouble. The Maguas, carrying palm branches and libations of milk and butter, led the way, gesticulating with head, body, and arms, their eyes lifted to heaven; the people, also bearing branches, followed. Around the rocks they danced and sang, intoning complaints. Then all went to the sea to beat the waves with the branches while the air was rent with cries and laments. Some say that at such times warriors threw themselves from the sacred rock, Tirma, as expiatory sacrifices. One of the very few idols found on the islands was a wooden image of a goat and a buck discovered at Tirma. Like the others of its class it may have been of Phenician origin.

The Palmans were also monotheistic; they raised to the Deity pyramids of stone and around them feasted, danced, and performed feats of strength and skill. In the great Caldera—the immense crater which is the wonder of geologists—was a rock six hundred feet high, like an immense obelisk, which was deified under the name of *Idafe*. Presents and prayers were made to it, probably with the idea of averting its fall. Whenever a sheep or a goat was killed, two men were deputed to carry to its base the heart, lungs, and liver. Approaching with fear and trembling,

one said, "Wilt thou fall, Idafe?" to which the other answered, "Give to him and he will not fall." Sometimes the Palmans also threw sacrificial animals from the rocky precipices.

The people of Hierro prayed only when in trouble; the men had one god, the women another. On conversion to the Catholic faith the islanders gave the names of these two deities to Jesus and Mary respectively. They believed that when the heavenly powers wished to do them good, they descended to two great rocks still pointed out as the "Santillos de los Antiguos," where they received petitions, afterward returning to their own place. In times of drought the people assembled around these rocks to pray for rain. If, after three days of fasting, their petitions remained unanswered, a holy man was sent to a certain cave from which he brought a sacred pig. Taking it from beneath his mantle in the presence of the shouting crowd, he set it free to roam as it would until the coming of the rain, when it was returned in triumph to its prison. Glas says that this pig was thought to be the devil, who was greatly learned in the ways of nature and produced rain to blind the people and make them worship him.

In Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, circular temples surrounded by two concentric walls were built on the mountain tops. Here offerings of butter and libations of milk were made which, according to André Benaldos, "repandait une forte mauvaise odeur." The people also worshiped their god from the summits of the mountains, lifting their hands to heaven and pouring out libations of milk. When the Spaniards came to Fuerteventura two women were held in great repute as prophetesses. They were supposed to hold communication with the devil; one of them settled disputes, while the other regulated ceremonies. Dr Chil says that good and ill were also foretold from the direction taken by the smoke of barley burned as a sacrifice.